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ABSTRACT

These four papers are from a symposium facilitated by Gene Roth on research centers at the 1995 Academy of Human Resource Development (HRD) conference. "Research: The Thin Blue Line between Rigor and Reality" (Michael Leimbach) discusses the need for HRD research to increase its speed and rigor and help organizations focus on capability modeling and development impact. "Zenger Miller's Research Center: Mission, Strategies, Agonies, and Ecstasies" (Darlene Russ-Eft) reviews the history and mission of the center and specific projects, such as calculation of benefits and costs of interpersonal skills training, and total quality management. "ASTD's Research Program: Performance and Workplace Learning" (Martha A. Gephart, Lara Hewitt) describes how the American Society for Training and Development's research program is working within a global context to build the knowledge base necessary to link research, policy, and practice in three key areas: performance, learning, and training. "Human Resource Development Research Center--A Decade of Innovation" (Richard A. Swanson) profiles the University of Minnesota HRD Research Center. (KC)

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[19] **RESEARCH CENTERS: Ecstasies, & Agonies** Facilitator: Gene Roth, Northern Illinois University

Research: The Thin Blue Line Between Rigor and Reality
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Human Resource Development Research Center: A Decade of Innovation
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Research: The Thin Blue Line Between Rigor And Reality:

Michael Leimbach, Ph.D.
Wilson Learning Corporation

The ability of the human resource development capability to contribute strategically to organizational growth in part hinges on integrating the research capability into HRD practices. Research technology can potentially play a significant role throughout organizational and individual development, however current perspectives and techniques often limit them to front-end or back-end contributions. Among the challenges facing HRD research is increasing both the speed and rigor of research processed, and helping organizations focus on capability modeling and development impact.

There is a broad range of activities that can be grouped as research within human resource development. Research can encompass theory development, hypothesis testing, needs analysis, instrument and survey development, evaluation and assessment, to name a few. However, whether theory, application, or practical outcomes result, what links these diverse elements is the inevitable tension between the neatness of the research abstractions and the messiness of the reality. Research is the point at which the need to answer realistic questions meets the need for rigorous approach and methodologies. The degree to which these merge or conflict represent, for me, the "Ecstasy and Agony" of working in a research center.

The ecstasies occur when rigor and reality merge. There are few things more beautiful than a solid, research based model or theory that answers important, real, questions. In contrast, what can hold us back is the apparent contradiction between these to values. The need for rigor; statistical validation, conceptual integrity, and measurement precision, can lead us to answer trivial questions. And, the attractiveness of a simple answer to a profound question can lead us to ignore the value of solid research processes.

In some respects the future of human resource development hinges, in part, on our ability to increase the occurrences of this merger and decrease the occurrences of the contradictory relationship. While we all hope that human resource development will increasingly be seen as a strategic resource, with this role comes the need to meet increasingly quantifiable measures of performance and standards of excellence. When once it was sufficient for human resource development to be more art, to be a strategic resource it must be an appropriate balance of art and science.

Research Capability At Wilson Learning

The research practices Wilson Learning engages in are a reflection of the procedures and philosophy that we value. As a result, to discuss the Wilson Learning research capability is to also describe the "ecstasies" that we experience. For Wilson Learning, the research capability has four principle elements

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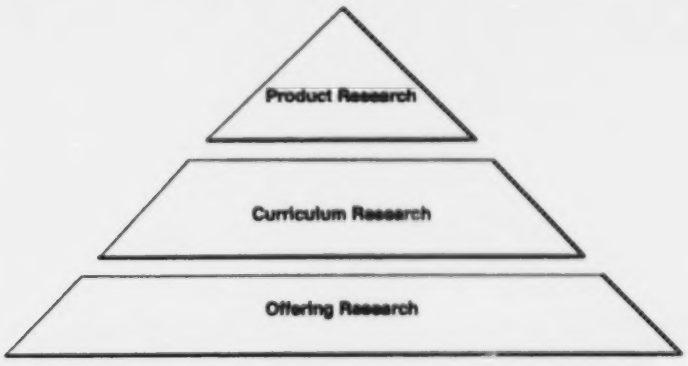
Design Research. We have found that the most successful program development efforts emerge when design research is an integral part of our ongoing research and development effort. The primary purpose of design research is to insure that the content, models, and perspectives we take on an issue are supported by research or existing theory. We have developed our design research capability to address three distinct levels of analysis.

Offering Research. At the broadest level offering research is our way of staying well informed of the changes facing organizations in the domains in which we operate. We conduct literature reviews and meta-analysis of client specific research to identify new technologies, models, or paradigms for a particular domain such as sales effectiveness or teamwork.

Curriculum Research. Curriculum research is a narrowing of focus to a particular capability but also an expansion of the research efforts to include both quantitative and qualitative primary research, concept tests with user audiences, and confirmation of the accuracy of predictive models through our database analyses.

Product Research. Finally, at the product level, we test and research specific instructional methodologies and models. The effort is to insure that the content of the program is accurate and effective. At this level we further narrow the focus to a particular set of performance outcomes, but direct specific research to confirm the value of these outcomes, developmental pilot research, participant reactions and knowledge gain research.



The vision of our design research effort is to continuously search for the elegant perspectives and models to direct our program development efforts. We use the term elegance to communicate the value we place in models that are simple but rich in application. Our best

efforts have been based on models or concepts that are easy to understand and remember but continue to speak to people throughout their lives.

Measurement System Development. Wilson Learning's Research capability began 20 years ago with our development and validation of measurement systems. Currently, WLC has approximately 20 individual measurement system products and over 60 cultural adaptations of these produces for other cultures and languages. Development of new measurement systems continues to be our primary research function. For Wilson Learning the purpose of a measurement system is to provide a framework for gathering data about performance factors and converting the data into useful information leading to action. Some use terms such as instruments, feedback instruments, and surveys to describe this domain. We prefer the term measurement system because to move from data to action requires more than a survey, but a system of components that include questionnaires, data collection processes, reporting processes, and interpretation guides.

Our measurement systems focus on individual, team and organizational needs and take many forms including self-assessments, "360 degree" feedback, objective measures and expert observations. These measurement systems are designed to serve our clients to help diagnose improvement needs, to provide valid information to support a learning event, to guide development and action planning, to evaluate the outcomes of learning processes, and to determine alignment of markets, strategies, global operations, organizational capabilities.

All of our measurement systems are developed within the context of a common philosophy concerning what makes effective measurement.

Useful, Reliable, and Valid	**Appropriate Sources**
Actionable	**Appropriate Information**

Useful Reliable and Valid. One of our core values is that the only useful measurement system is one that has a high degree of validity, but validity itself does not guarantee usefulness. To develop people based upon measurement results that are not valid can misdirect development efforts. But to provide valid information that does not accurately reflect the participant's own world. or is not actionable, serves no ultimate purpose. We believe that it is important to go beyond content validity in our development efforts and conduct construct and predictive validation studies of all of our measurement system products. But concerns over validity do not take precedence over the need to have the measurement reflect the participants real world.

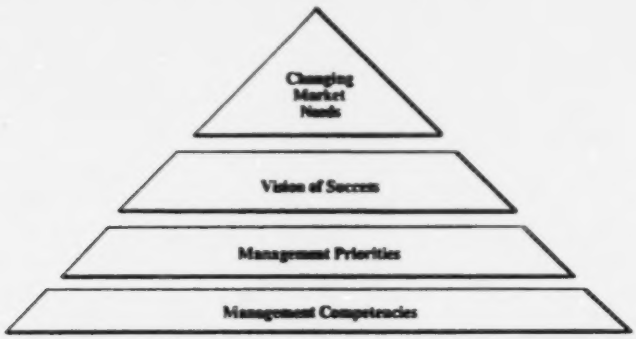
Appropriate Sources of Information. While 360 degree feedback processes are popular, we have long followed a perspective that different sources have different perceptions and information. Our measurement systems are designed from the perspective that identifying the most appropriate sources of information is as important as identifying the information content itself.

Appropriate Amount of Information. We have found that differentiating between data, information, and knowledge is critical to successfully communicating the results and value of measurement. We place a great deal of emphasis on assuring that the information presented does not paralyze action, but invigorates it.

Actionable. Our final core principle is that measurement that does not lead to action has little value. Part of the art and science of measurement system development is in presenting information in such a way at to link to meaningful performance outcomes or strategies and help the individual or organization construct a chain from data to action.

Client Selection and Needs Assessment Studies. Paralleling our measurement system capability is our research services capability, in which we deliver to customers research analyses that assist organizations in selecting employees for hiring or promoting, or identify, analyze, and assess organizational or developmental needs. As with the measurement systems, our client research capability is driven by a sent of core principles.

Linking Client Strategy to Behavior. While ultimately the purpose of selection or need assessment research is to understand actions and processes, we believe that these must be understood within the context of organizational performance. When we conduct a study for a client, we always incorporate the components of the following model.



Only by beginning the process with an understanding of the organization's market needs and how the organization creates its vision of success to meet these needs, can we then begin the process of understand how management priorities and competencies support that vision of success.

Multi-Source and Multi-Methods. The Wilson Learning client research services capability grew up largely around a software program and process we refer to as the Innovator®. The Innovator® is the marriage of a Group Decision Support Tool (See Poole, 1991 for a description) and a flexible set of research protocols that incorporate the best of qualitative and quantitative analyses. We have found that the most effective research processes allow for different stakeholders to drive the discussion points, capture a richness of description and content, but also provide the objective elements of ratings, ranks and standardized measurement scales.

Training and Development Impact Analysis. In an effort to help clients make informed decisions, WLC conduces evaluations of its training and development programs to determine the impact they are having on organizations. Among others, our evaluation activities include:

- Ongoing participant reaction surveys for all of our programs.
- Analysis of measurement database to determine behaviors changes that result from training.
- Special studies linking training effects to strategic outcomes.

One of the significant insights we have gained was a recognition of the need to address different levels of intervention with different evaluation outcomes. This was in part driven by a level of discomfort we felt when we provided clients with an ROI analysis for an individual training program. In our hearts we new that a training program itself does not drive to

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performance outcomes. Only when a program is part of a broader curriculum or system did we feel justified in claiming credit for improved bottom or top line outcomes. This insight let to the development of this impact evaluation model.

	Development Systems	Development Curricula	Development Programs
Satisfaction (Reaction)	Satisfaction with HRD strategy and operation.	Satisfaction with offering.	Satisfaction with events.
Competence (Knowledge) (Attitude)	Linkage between CSF and competencies.	Skill and competency development.	Knowledge and attitude development.
Performance (Behavior) (Results)	Link with business performance impact.	Job performance impact.	On-the-job actions.

Challenges Facing Research Capabilities

Most of the "ecstasies" we have experienced are imbedded in our approach and philosophy to research. In addition, our "agonies" are less a reflection of concerns or problems but more reflective of cross-roads that we see before us. There are several issues that represent critical junctures. One rode will lead us to a merger of rigor and reality, the other to either a lack of rigor or a separation from reality.

Linking Training Needs to Organizational Strategy. Research efforts that focus exclusively on skills or actions are fundamentally flawed! While ultimately the purpose of research is to understand actions and processes, these must be understood within the context of organizational performance. Too often we treat research, especially need analysis, as only a process for identifying skill or competency gaps. We often fail to also ask whether these competencies need to be performed at all. In other words, central to the needs analysis research process should also be the question of how the skills and capabilities contribute to organizational performance and success. Ultimately, the behavioral practices of the individual are (or should be) linked to customer satisfaction, but rarely does needs analysis research include customer input, unless it is a direct service role. David Kearn (CEO of Xerox Corporation) suggested this when he said: "The strategy of the company, the direction of the company, and the skills and behaviors that people need ... should all be combined and integrated" (Galagan, 1990).

If we view the research process more as the thread that links the organization's market, strategy, and critical success factors to HRD practices, and less as a "front-end" process, we would more successfully provided the value expected from the research process.

Concern With Training Impact. Over just the past five to seven years, we have seen a great increase in organization's interest in and desire for data to demonstrate the impact of the training on performance. Unfortunately, it has been our experience that while many organizations want to know that programs are effective, few are willing to pay the price to actually find out. They rely instead on antidotal information, poorly designed research, or estimates for ROI based on subject matter expert evaluations of value. There is little guidance for organizational decision makers, or even HRD professionals, to separate research that accurately demonstrates the impact of the training through rigorous design from research that is non-generalizable, confounded, or does not in fact have data to support their contentions.

A case in point is a competitor of ours in the sales training arena. As part of their program, they have salespeople develop a case analysis of a particular sales opportunity. In this analysis the salesperson records, among other things, when the client will probably make a decision. To prove to a client that they have evidence of effectiveness, they do a follow-up

phone call with the participants. They ask the salespeople two simple questions: "Was the sales a success?" and "How much revenue was involved?" They then take the total revenue from successful sales, divide by the costs to train the salespeople, and report that result to the client (and others) as the ROI. In other words, if the sale occurred after the salesperson attended the class, the sole cause of winning that sales was the training program.

Speed and Rigor. Jeremy Rifkin (1987) suggested that speed, more than anything else, defines our culture in the 90s. Our business world, as well as society in general, seems obsessed with speed. Time to market, development cycle time, production time, and other time frame issues occupy the executives mind more than anything else. D'Aveni (1994) has even suggested that "Speed" should replace at lease one of the "S's" in the McKinsey 7-S framework.

As companies careen toward the future, They will look upon our research methodologies as to cumbersome and slow. Unfortunately, there is a perception (and to some degree, a reality) that systematic research takes so long that once the research is done, the skills and practices are obsolete because the market has changed. Or, as David Kearn said "The toughest problem that training professionals have within a company is how to interpret and integrate new ideas into the training and how to do it quickly" (Galagan, 1990).

Organizations are no longer able to wait six to twelve months to research, design, develop, and deliver training and development programs. Not conducting the needed research is not an issue of money or desire, but of time. We greatly need to develop rigorous research processes that reduce the time between when the organizations ask the question and when the researcher can provide an actionable answer. Otherwise, organizations will turn to less reliable, but faster processes to collect information for making strategic HRD decisions

Capability Modeling. While significant modifications have been made over the years, the fundamental principles of how we organize our understanding of human resource development is still rooted in the principles of Frederick Taylor, Eli Whitney, and Adam Smith. Unfortunately, the Taylor/Whitney/Smith model of the organization was build for a time and a set of conditions that no longer exist. While far from an exhaustive list:

- Individual performance is rapidly being replace by team performance.
- A number of authors (e.g. Torraco, 1994) have focused our attention on the disappearance of the "job" within today's business structure. In today's organization the job is simply too fluid to be a meaningful starting point for HRD research analyses.
- Functional lines of control and management have or are being replaced by cross-functional leadership or process oriented structures.
- Work goals and objectives change rapidly to meet changing market needs. I don't know anyone today who has a job description that matches what he or she really does.

Yet, most of our research paradigms today tend to assume the tenants of the Taylor/Whitney/Smith model. We conduct job analysis, we conduct job needs assessments, we evaluate the impact of training on individual performance improvement, we research functional competencies. We have all lamented when we realize that our subject population has been reduced because half of the people are no longer in the job we are studying, but we tend not to question whether we should be studying jobs at all. By selecting people for jobs, or designing research studies around a job defined sample, are we researching something that is no longer relevant?

In Summary: Research Standards? In many respects, part of the answer to these issue might be to look closely at the standards that define research practices in human resource development. Give this cross-roads we are facing, should we consider clarifying some of the following?

- Measurement system standards: What represents minimal levels of validation for different purposes? The only ones that exist today are for selection and those are primarily focused on meetings legal challenges and EEOC standards of non-discrimination. What about standards for diagnostic, feedback or other forms of measurement?
- Should there be standards to recommend that needs analysis and assessment process link to organization performance, strategy and/or market needs?
- Should there be realistic standards or recommendations for researching and reporting training effectiveness research? And, should there be an evaluation of current effectiveness reports?
- Should we include speed and customer satisfaction as requirements of effective research?

At the same time, we need to forge a new perspective on standards themselves. While we need to communicate definitions and suggested procedures for conducting, reporting, and comparing research efforts, these cannot be communicated as ridged requirements.

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Zenger Miller's Research Center: Mission, Strategies, Agonies, and Ecstasies

Darlene Russ-Eft
Zenger Miller

This paper reviews the work of the Research Center at Zenger Miller. It presents the history and mission of the center. It reviews some specific projects, including research on positive versus negative models; the measurement of the benefits and costs of interpersonal skills training; the prediction of organizational orientation to teams; and organizations' experiences with the strategies of TQM, teams, and process management. The final section describes some of the agonies and ecstasies of working in this environment.

One advantage or disadvantage of working in a private company is that you find little time to spend reflecting on the past. Most of your time focuses on dealing with the present and planning for the future. This symposium has given me the permission to indulge in a moment or two of reflection.

I will begin by reviewing some of Zenger Miller's history and the research function within it. I will then share the mission statement of the Research Center. A review of some example projects will follow. With all this as background, I can come to the major point: the Agonies and the Ecstasies of running a research center.

History

Jack Zenger and Dale Miller founded Zenger Miller in 1977 as a consulting company. They found that their clients demanded a supervisory skills training program that provided the "how-to" skills that enable participants to perform at exceptionally high levels. Unable to find any that met client needs, Zenger Miller formally entered the packaged training arena in 1978 with its own supervisory system.

In the earliest days, Zenger Miller assisted clients in determining whether training led to behavioral changes. Such research efforts were typically undertaken through contracts with researchers or graduate students.

A formal research function began operating at Zenger Miller in 1984. That research group continued to support training evaluation efforts at client companies. In addition, the research focused on issues related to product development.

In 1987 the Research Center evolved into an operation that began to focus more and more on the external customer. The Zenger Miller Research Center began offering research services in the areas of needs assessments, training evaluations, and multi-rater assessment. For the next several years, the Research Center continued to concentrate efforts on client-directed research projects.

A change in direction occurred in 1992 out of the recognition that internal customer needs were receiving low priority. So, more resources were allocated to answering the information needs of customers within Zenger Miller. In the initial stages, the primary internal customers came from Product Development and Marketing.

During the past year, the Research Center's internal focus has expanded. In addition to Product Development and Marketing, the center provides consulting and research services

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to all groups within Zenger Miller. In addition, the center recognized the importance of providing research support to the Times Mirror Training Group, since Zenger Miller is one of four training companies forming this group. Therefore, beginning last year, we undertook research efforts on behalf of and in conjunction with our sister companies.

Mission

Each year the Research Center staff reviews our mission statement. We all feel that such a review is important in helping to establish a direction and priorities. Because of its importance, we have, in some years, undertaken this review as a center initiative. In other cases, this review has become part of the larger strategic planning within all of Zenger Miller.

The following are some excerpts from the 1994 mission statement:

> To address important issues which can be acted upon to lead to improved quality of life within organizations.
>
> To provide fast turnaround, actionable research to enable Zenger Miller to make informed decisions.
>
> To educate Zenger Miller, our clients and the world about the benefits of research.

The statements reflect our belief that we conduct each of our research projects to yield some tangible benefit and to make a difference within the larger society.

Example Projects

Positive versus Negative Models. One of our early studies focused on gaining further understanding of the benefits (or lack thereof) of positive and negative models. The study began with an extensive literature review and contacting of researchers in the field. Surprisingly, we found limited resources. Though we have heard many opinions, we found only one formal study testing positive and negative models (Alssid & Hutchingson, 1977), and that study was focused on counselor training. To facilitate this research effort, we edited existing videos to yield four types: a positive model followed by a positive model, a positive model followed by a negative model, a negative model followed by a positive model, and a negative model followed by a negative model. Zenger Miller researchers used these videos with training individuals in one or more sets of key behaviors over the course of a three-week period. At each session, participants were tested for recognition, recall, and performance. In addition, we made these tapes available to university researchers.

The following are some of the major conclusions from this research effort: (1) recall, recognition, and performance for those seeing the negative/negative models were at a lower level than for those in the other conditions; (2) people in the other three conditions displayed similar levels of recognition, recall, and performance -- after the second model; and (3) the mixed conditions of positive/negative and negative/positive appeared to aid learning when key behaviors are subtle or ambiguous. These results (Russ-Eft & Zucchelli, 1987) and subsequent research provided Zenger Miller with some guidelines for the development of training videos using behavior modeling.

Return on the Investment for Training. Regardless of the type of training, organizations are concerned with measuring the impact. Interpersonal skills training provides a particular challenge when calculating the return on investment. To provide the client with needed information and to develop a model for measuring the return on the investment for interpersonal skills training, Zenger Miller researchers assisted a client in conducting a cost-benefit study (Russ-Eft, Krishnamurthi, & Ravishankar, 1994).

The client organization provides information services, through publications, software, and other services. Trainees came from the professional and support levels within the

organization. Control groups included people from similar functions who were scheduled to take training at a later time. Ratings of on-the-job behaviors centered on four areas: dealing with problems, communicating with coworkers, working with superiors, and improving work. These ratings were completed by the target groups, as well as by their supervisors and colleagues. We converted skill improvements into dollars using information on the percentage of time spent by each trainee on the skill area when on the job, together with that person's salary. Costs for the training included the material costs and the time costs.

The major conclusion was that the interpersonal skills program had a positive effect on the bottom line and that the HRD expense was justified. After training, trainees were using the skills more often and more effectively than the control group.

Orientation to Teams. The Research Center conducted a series of studies examining factors critical for the success of self-directed work teams. Researchers and experts in self-directed work teams conducted one to two day site visits to each organization or organizational site. During these site visits, data were collected through interviews with key executives, focus groups with managers, focus groups with associates, questionnaires for managers, and questionnaires for associates. Researchers and consultants in self-directed work teams analyzed the data and provided each organization with recommendations to advance the development of the teams. At the conclusion of 10 such organizational studies, separate database analyses were undertaken. One such set of analyses focused on identifying the factors or conditions that best predict the organizational orientation that favors teams (Russ-Eft, 1993). The five best predictors were: relationships within organization-wide management, innovation on the job, control of work by the immediate manager or supervisor, group cohesiveness, and open group process within the work group.

Quality, Teams, and Process Management. Another research project focused on emerging trends in teams and total quality management (TQM) initiatives (Moran, Hogeveen, Latham, & Russ-Eft, 1994). Specifically, this effort focused on determining the factors associated with the adoption of TQM and teams efforts, the success of TQM and teams efforts, and the management of strategic processes.

A questionnaire was mailed to 4,500 potential respondents across North America. The survey yielded a 22 percent response rate. In addition, we undertook a non-respondent follow-up. Using techniques developed for the Census Bureau and the National Center for Education Statistics, we adjusted the statistics to account for non-respondent bias.

The major conclusions were as follows. First, the adoption of TQM, teams, or process management is pervasive; furthermore, more than 50 percent of organizations implement the three efforts together. Second, the greatest successes were reported by organizations adopting an integrated approach to the various initiatives.

Review of these Examples. The previous description of some research projects provides a picture of the types and range of projects that the Research Center undertakes. Although many of the projects tend to be quantitative in nature, we also use qualitative methods. Some of the studies use experimental designs; others use survey research; and still others use observational techniques. In all cases, however, the major purpose is to provide the client with information that can be used for decision-making.

The Agonies

The Zenger Miller Research Center provides practical solutions and information to its internal and external customers. A major agony involves the researchers' need for the bigger picture when responding to requests. A first question that we like to ask is, "So, why do you need this information?" And the second question is, "What do you plan to do with it?" In some cases, customers seem reluctant or unable to clarify their requests. This may come from a lack of planning or from a desire to get started NOW.

Another agony involves the differing perceptions of "quality" by the Research Center

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and by both internal and external customers. For example, the checking, double-checking, and triple-checking of data and analyses by researchers can lead to some increases in time and costs. And, in some instances, the customer may see little value, particularly when the correction may only change a figure in the second decimal place.

Finally, being "overworked and underpaid" can be considered another agony associated with working at the Research Center. The multitude of high priority research projects demands full time and attention. This leaves precious little time for preparing publications for the research community. In some instances, the researchers literally feel that they are "sneaking away from work" to prepare an important research paper.

The Ecstasies

Having said all this, however, I must conclude that the ecstasies outweigh the agonies. One of the most gratifying rewards is the use of research results for decision-making. Previous personal involvement in major government research studies that resulted in reports sitting on a shelf has prepared me for understanding the limited use of research results. Therefore, the other researchers and I experience a great deal of satisfaction when we see the results of our labors being used to drive decisions within Zenger Miller.

Collaboration with both internal and external customers is also a source of satisfaction. We find that our customers are among the wisest, most intelligent, and most caring in the world. Working with such customers expands our thinking and action.

Similarly, collaboration with other researchers provides benefits in both directions. Such collaborative efforts include working with graduate student interns, supporting other graduate students in the development and conduct of masters and doctoral dissertations, and developing joint research projects with researchers in other organizations. In all these instances, we learn a great deal from each other.

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ASTD's Research Program: Performance and Workplace Learning

Martha A. Gephart
Lara Hewitt

American Society for Training and Development[1]

Responding to increased global competition, businesses are striving to increase performance to retain a competitive advantage. ASTD is uniquely situated as a leader in improving performance in the workplace. ASTD's research program is working within a global context, from a systemic perspective to build the knowledge base necessary to link research, policy, and practice in three key areas: performance, learning, and training.

The Context: Global Changes and the Quest for Performance

Global competition has radically transformed the nature and organization of work worldwide. Increasing global and domestic competition assure that the rate of change will increase and intensify for the foreseeable future. In response to these changes, businesses are striving to remain as competitive as possible. The movement toward continuous performance improvement further heightens international competition. Other drivers of change include advances in technology, pressures to restructure in financial markets driven by changes in ownership structure, an increasingly skilled workforce, and changing ideas about the organization of corporations.

In response to international competition and pressures to increase shareholder value, performance, and profits, companies have downsized to reduce costs and introduced new forms of work organization, and principles of organizational design. Efforts to reduce costs and improve operating efficiencies have focused attention on rethinking the tasks that organizations need to perform. Companies have turned to reinvention, reengineering, revitalization, and transformation--leading to fundamental changes in how work is organized, how leadership is practiced, how mission is articulated, and how culture is created. These change strategies reflect a conviction that systemic responses are required to increase performance in the face of continual global change.

Quest for Performance

The quest for performance--the push to deliver even greater competence and sustained productivity in the workplace--has led companies to undertake radical internal change in response to global change. Companies have responded to a whirlwind of new demands, but often the productivity gains have been modest--or only short term. Reinvention and transformation are means in the search for improved performance.

A powerful component of performance improvement is learning, which is being reengineered in high performance companies, as never before, to get knowledge, skills, and intelligence into the hands of the workers and teams, when and where they need them.

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[1] For fifty years, the American Society for Training and Development has been the leading professional association for workplace learning and performance.

ASTD's Role in the Context of Global Changes

ASTD is committed to envisioning the workplace of the future and to helping companies prepare to meet the performance demands of that vision. ASTD is a forum where all these performance stakeholders and ideas come together -- a global link for building and sharing new strategies for performance.

ASTD is uniquely positioned among organizations:

- in its ability to provide leadership in improving performance in the workplace;
- in reaching learning, management, and performance leaders in companies, industry associations, governmental and policy organizations, and universities;
- in focusing on the developmental needs of human beings in organizations, in contrast to other societies which focus primarily on the tools for workplace learning and performance;
- through its multi-level access to those who think about organizational systems and change from the top down and from the bottom up;
- and through its links with American and non-American actors concerned with workplace learning and performance.

ASTD stands at the center of the performance/learning nexus, helping companies understand performance from both a developmental and a systems perspective, helping them shorten the loop that connects learning to working, serving as a preeminent catalyst for building intellectual capital to support performance, and supporting specialists in human resources, learning, training, and performance who want to be tomorrow's leaders in reengineering learning to deliver performance.

Through research, invitational symposia, publishing, and on-line learning and worksharing among practitioners and leaders, ASTD is continuously building the knowledge base that fuels performance enhancement in the workplace.

Among businesses, in government, and within the human resource development profession, improved performance is increasingly viewed as the key to competitiveness for individuals and organizations. As the leading professional association in a field that is undergoing rapid change, ASTD, through its research program and the products that result from it, will contribute to the knowledge base that fuels performance enhancement in the workplace.

ASTD's Research Program

The research program plays a pivotal role in building the knowledge base to support ASTD's performance enhancement mission. In its research, ASTD strives to break new ground in understanding the systems dimensions of performance; in articulating the differing requirements of individual, team, and organizational performance; and in defining the links between performance and learning.

Mission and Strategies The overall mission of the research department is to support ASTD as a leader in improving performance in the workplace. The research program uses several key strategies to achieve this mission:

- concentrating on key emerging issues -- high performance workplace systems, new and old learning models, and the volume, impact, and distribution of training -- from a performance perspective;
- working to expand alliances with U.S. and international institutions to gain access to research and to leverage ASTD's research impact, visibility, and dissemination capability;
- convening researchers, policy makers, and practitioners in the field of workplace issues to continually integrate knowledge, and bridging research, policy, and practice;

- seeking to establish itself as an international clearing house for knowledge and best practice information on high performance workplace systems and new models of learning;
- and positioning it within the information highway by developing new on-line products from research, establishing local, national, and international on-line networks of researchers and practitioners to exchange information about improved performance in the workplace.

Principles/Assumptions Several assumptions guide the research on learning and performance in the workplace that ASTD conducts.

ASTD's research agenda responds to trends in the field. The changing trends in business, technology, and training have significant implications for human resource professionals. A central assumption of ASTD's research is to clarify the meaning and implications of these trends for performance. ASTD's research program focuses on the concerns of multiple constituencies, including new and old members and customers. Trends suggest that the role of the trainer is being transformed, becoming more flexible, and that there may be less emphasis on training *per se*.

The context for ASTD's research on workplace learning is the global system; international comparisons are be included whenever feasible. ASTD's research program has a systemic orientation, with research activities focused on aspects of workplace learning and performance in the context of organizational performance and/or change.

Collaboration with researchers, practitioners, and policy makers is essential. ASTD's research program is committed to the principle that the agendas for research and ideas to pursue will arise out of collaboration with those who will use the results. A commitment to early collaboration in research programs among the users and producers of knowledge contributes substantially to ASTD's objective of conducting applied research that bridges theory and practice.

ASTD's research agenda is comprised of projects on performance, learning, training, and the links among them.

ASTD Research Projects

Performance

Diversity. Globalization and increasing ethnic and gender diversity in the workforce are the impetus for the current focus on the management of cultural differences. Managing diversity is essential to improved performance. With support from the Department of Labor and the Joyce Foundation, ASTD has investigated the sources and nature of increasing diversity in the American workplace. The findings, published in *The American Mosaic: An In Depth Report on Diversity in U.S. Workplaces* (forthcoming), show that the impetus for the dramatic increase in companies' interest in diversity initiatives in the 1990s stems from the recognition by companies that valuing and managing diversity can enhance organizational effectiveness and create a competitive advantage.

ASTD's research suggests that the goal of managing diversity is to maximize organizational performance by capitalizing on the benefits of a diverse workforce. We know from research and practice that employees who live and work in integrated settings develop stronger interpersonal and communication skills and become more effective inside and outside of work. Moreover, during the past few years, it has become increasingly clear that companies that perform diversity and related human resource work significantly outperform those that do not, when measured in terms of financial performance, and recruiting and retaining a high quality workforce. In the long term, well managed diverse teams typically outperform homogeneous teams in the quality of their work and decision making. This is partly due to the variety of perspectives brought to issues, higher levels of critical analysis of alternatives, and lower probability of premature consensus in the interest of group cohesiveness.

Successful companies realize that managing diversity is not accomplished by a one-time program, but typically requires a long term comprehensive organizational change process. Research reveals that training is often the first step in such a process, followed by comprehensive organizational cultural assessment, obtaining the action-oriented commitment of the leadership, assessment of the results of the diversity program by establishing meaningful numerical goals and monitoring progress in meeting them, and finally, developing initiatives that are strategically linked to organizational needs, organizational culture, and business goals.

To assist businesses in achieving these goals, ASTD has compiled strategies and resources for addressing diversity issues in the individual, interpersonal, and organizational spheres. In *Tools and Activities for a Diverse Workforce* (forthcoming), ASTD brings together diversity tools and strategies used by the nation's top employers and diversity specialists in order to increase performance in an increasingly diverse workplace.

ASTD's research will continue to focus on diversity issues and in its research on high performance work.

High Performance Work. Diversity is only one element in the current emphasis on improving performance. In addition to achieving a competitive edge through managing a diverse workforce, work needs to be reorganized in order to promote creative employee involvement, provide continuous learning, and to elicit enhanced performance. Thus, a second strategy increasingly employed by businesses to achieve competitive advantage through improved performance is the introduction of changes designed to create high performance workplace systems.

With support from the Department of Labor and the Joyce Foundation, ASTD has investigated the restructuring of work and the impact of high performance workplace practices on managers' assessments of improvements in performance and productivity. The resulting study--*The Reorganization of Work: What Works in High Performance Workplaces*--is based on a survey of 239 organizations that identified themselves as having undertaken some type of restructuring. The study considered who initiated the restructuring, what caused the beginning of work improvement, and what were the goals of the restructuring. The study investigated components that are believed to be part of high performance work, including organizational characteristics, technology, restructuring practices, and strategic change management.

Results of ASTD's study, and others like it, are essential to the understanding of how a high performance workplace operates. Much of the research to date on high performance work has focused on specific workplace practices--such as empowerment, teamwork, flatter organizational structures, and enhanced communication. An accepted definition of high performance work does not exist; existing definitions typically identify sets of elements, components, or practices that are thought to characterize high performance work. The challenge before ASTD is to synthesize and assess existing theory, research, and practice about high performance work systems. ASTD aims to define high performance work systems, guide the application of underlying principles in the workplace, and influence policy to promote an environment fostering improved performance for American business and workers.

In a series of workshops during 1995, ASTD will create a forum in which researchers, practitioners, and policy makers can discuss these issues. A larger conference in the winter of 1995 will bring together these perspectives and link the research, practice, and policy issues surrounding high performance work. In convening these meetings, ASTD is collaborating with leading organizations and researchers working on high performance work issues--including labor and industrial relations economists, organizational psychologists and sociologists, and human resource specialists. This collaboration will be a crucial step in the process of defining high performance work, understanding current practices, and creating environments that promote improved performance. An effort to help clarify the state of knowledge and practice in this area, these workshops will build on a white paper on high performance workplace systems that will published by ASTD in the Spring and the International Conference Session on the High Performance Workplace, in June, 1995.

Managing Change Toward High Performance Work Systems. In addition to the several synthetic papers that will result from these activities, ASTD is planning to produce a practitioners'

guide on the transition to high performance work systems to assist businesses and consultants in moving toward high performance work systems and improved performance.

In preparing this guide, ASTD will investigate new and old approaches to systemic organizational change that integrate technology and learning in the workplace to create high performance work organizations. ASTD may review and synthesize the published body of knowledge. It may also convene individuals, many of whom are ASTD members, to discuss new approaches to systemic change which they are active in developing. These activities would enhance understanding of the challenges of implementing large scale change in organizations today.

Learning Continuous learning in the workplace is another key component of obtaining competitive advantage in an era of rapid global change. Advances in basic research during the past two decades have transformed our understanding of modes of thought, kinds of intelligence, kinds of knowledge, learning processes, human development, and motivation. These new understandings have important implications for workplace learning. The nature of learning in the workplace is also changing. Learning is becoming more integrated with work. Self directed and team learning are replacing classroom training. There is new interest in group and organizational learning. The content of learning and training is shifting away from skill building and information transfer.

New Models of Learning. Several ongoing research programs are attempting to integrate (and refine) advances in basic research on cognition, learning, and development through their investigation of learning in workplace settings. ASTD's research program is reviewing this work, synthesizing old and new research on individual, group, and organizational learning; and clarifying the implications for effective learning and performance in the workplace.

A collaborative, multidisciplinary approach to learning in the workplace has not been extensively applied in traditional research on learning. The focus has been in terms of "school" learning, either elementary or continuing adult education. However, the average person spends learns more of his/her life in the workplace than in school. To realize the goal of life-long learning, more researcher and practitioner efforts should be focused on workplace learning, and its role in the high performance organization. ASTD is currently identifying the most promising areas for future research.

Addressing the breadth and complexity of workplace learning necessitates collaboration between researchers and practitioners. Researchers have developed a substantial amount of learning theory. Practitioners have similarly produced a significant set of learning methods. The challenge for ASTD is to integrate these ideas and to approach research on learning from both viewpoints. Researchers tend to test theory in experimental settings that fail to allow for the social and contextual basis of learning. Practitioners generate methods based on workplace experience, but the individual elements with the greatest impact are not often identified. ASTD's program will include collaborative research that attempts to bridge the gulf between theory and practice.

A gap in the current work of researchers and practitioners is a lack of multi-level analyses. What is the impact of individual learning on group learning? on organizational learning? ASTD's research will work toward identifying research methods that use a multilevel, systems approach. Organizations have an enormous impact on learning. What can organizations do to support workplace learning as they strive for high performance? Questions, such as this, need to be addressed.

Studying learning within the context of the high performance workplace requires that we reassess our measures of learning. Tests to measure the amount of knowledge that an individual has acquired do not necessarily transfer into increased performance. Researchers at ASTD are looking to develop long-term studies that address the issues of transfer and that take into account the possible multi-level effects of training and development.

ASTD is identifying these gaps in existing research by reviewing and synthesizing the old and new theories of learning. An experiential session at ASTD's International Conference in June, 1995, will further explore new models of learning through the lens of technology, identifying the nexus of learning theories and technology. Through a series of working papers and interpretive papers, ASTD is also studying the links between learning and high performance workplace systems to identify ways in which learning can improve performance.

Learning in the Service Industry. Some of the most convincing research on workplace learning and performance focuses on particular industries. Most of the existing work on high performance practices has focused on manufacturing enterprises such as the steel and automobile industries because differences in productivity between firms in the same industry are especially illustrative since production technology and products are similar. Issues of workplace learning and training have received much less attention in service industries than in manufacturing enterprises. Yet, service industries have become the major producers of GNP and new job opportunities in all of the advanced industrial societies. Some have argued that the revolution in information and communication technologies has made knowledge the new competitive resource and is blurring the traditional distinction between manufacturing and services as manufacturing companies increasingly build services directly into their products.

ASTD is reviewing what is known about learning, productivity, and performance in different service industries and activities. An important focus of new work will be the links among learning, technology and performance. Given the importance of service industries and activities in the U.S. and other advanced industrial economies, this research will be a valuable contribution to the field.

Technology. As technology transforms the logic of competition, some have argued that technology itself disappears as a sustainable source of competitive advantage, driving the logic of the new economy to the next step -- to people and their learning. The primacy of knowledge requires managers to rethink the fundamental practices of management. ASTD's research on technology and workplace learning will explore the links between new technology, workplace organization, and workplace learning. Further exploration is needed of the implications of new technologies and the increased use of technology for improving learning and performance in the workplace, and for the design and delivery of training and learning systems.

To achieve synergy between technology and human capacity, we need to understand better human cognitive and social processes as well as the human-technology interface. Advances in the study of perception, cognition, and human performance can aid in the design of complex information systems. At the same time, more research on cognition, perception and human performance in applied settings is needed to answer the challenges posed by placing such information systems into diverse work settings. ASTD's research is addressing the reciprocal relationships and interactions between people and technology, and the important implications for training in the workplace.

Training Training has also been dramatically transformed by the economic globalization. With support from the Department of Labor, from 1986 - 1990, ASTD undertook a study of *Training for a Changing Workforce*. Collaboration with expert advisory panels and networks of leaders from business, government, labor, and education produced three interim reports: *Workplace Basics: The Skills Employers Want, The Learning Enterprise, and (Training Partnerships: Linking Employees and Practices and America and the New Economy.* From 1986 to 1990, ASTD mapped the size and scope of training in organizations, offered policy recommendations for industry, government, and education, examined technical training, developed a model for establishing a workplace skill program, and outlined the new strategies, technologies, organizational structures and skills necessary for survival and growth in the new economy. ASTD's assessments, analyses, and policy recommendations for training in America appeared in a series of five books: *Training in America, Training in the Technical Workforce, Workplace Basics, Workplace Basics Training Manual, and America and the New Economy.*

A major wave of restructuring is currently transforming the ways in which people are thinking of training and learning systems. Companies are experimenting with centralization and decentralization, searching for the right mix of overall direction and local delivery of training. Training delivery is shifting from professional trainers to non-trainers such as managers, team leaders, and technical workers. Large companies are increasing their use of outside training providers for the design, delivery, and administration of training. Small companies are increasing their reliance on partnerships with other small companies, with community colleges, and with government organizations. Companies with large numbers of temporary or contract workers are

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facing the challenge of how to train, motivate, and communicate with an ad hoc workforce. More training is delivered in the context of a job or a task.

ASTD is investigating the radical transformations underway in the training field and assessing the implications of such efforts for training and learning systems in two projects: the Benchmarking of Training: Best Practices and Models in Training and Learning Systems, and the Volume, Distribution, and Impact of Employee Training.

The Benchmarking of Training. The ASTD Benchmarking Forum was established in 1991 to increase the effectiveness of training organizations in companies. The Forum was originally comprised of 19 firms; it has now grown to include 51 companies. Using the tools and techniques of benchmarking, the Forum seeks to identify and share best/successful practices of workplace training among member companies.

The Forum activities include establishing common metrics and operational definitions; gathering workplace training data from participating companies to develop a common, reliable, and shared database of information for members; and, demonstrating the benchmarking process to improve training in member companies and in the wider training community. This approach involves gathering and analyzing quantitative analyses of innovative and successful practices.

ASTD's Benchmarking Forum is responding to the dramatic changes in the training profession by expanding its focus to include such current developments as advanced delivery training methods and restructuring of training organizations. In addition to comparing training practices among member firms, the Forum is developing methods to better link training with performance, and to proactively monitor trends in the field.

The Volume, Impact, and Distribution of Training. Questions about the volume, distribution, and impact of employee training are among the most frequently asked by professionals, researchers, and policy makers in the HRD field. New data and analyses of worker training have become available over the past several years, and several new data collection efforts are currently underway.

With the objective of providing the best data on the scope, distribution, cost, and impact of worker training, ASTD is reviewing existing data, synthesizing results of new data collection efforts, and evaluating their effectiveness in light of the restructuring of training. The changes underway pose significant measurement challenges. Traditional measures of employee training, for example training days per student, are becoming less meaningful. Following these analyses, ASTD is planning to undertake a new data collection effort on employer-provided training.

Human Resource Development Research Center-- A Decade of Innovation

Richard A. Swanson
University of Minnesota

The University of Minnesota HRD Research Center conducts and disseminates scholarly inquiry on the practical problems of organization development and personnel training and development. Center funds come from business, industry, and government. Among the accomplishments, the Center has sponsored over seventy studies, has published and disseminated research findings, sponsored the ASTD Theory-to-Practice monograph series, and has served as the home of the Human Resource Development Quarterly. After a decade of work, the Center stills has an important role to play in the University of Minnesota graduate program and the profession.

The Human Resource Development (Human Resource Development) Research Center recently celebrated its tenth birthday. The Human Resource Development Research Center was know as the Training and Development Research Center (TDRC) most of its life. The Center works in harmony with the University of Minnesota graduate program and both changed their names in 1994 from T&D to Human Resource Development. What follows is a description of the Center followed by an analysis of the ecstasies and agonies of having a Center.

The Human Resource Development Research Center

Mission. The Human Resource Development Research Center engages in research and support for the improvement of organization development and personnel training & development in industry, business, and government.

The mission of the Human Resource Development Research Center is to promote, conduct, and disseminate inquiry about the practical and theoretical problems associated with developing and/or unleashing human expertise for the purpose of improving performance at the organization, process, and individual levels.

Program of Work. The Human Resource Development Research Center program of work includes:

1. Developing and validating sound Human Resource Development theories with special attention to economic, psychological, and systemic foundations.
2. Developing and validating effective (1) organization development and (2) personnel training and development tools and processes.
3. Researching the application of Human Resource Development theory and practice to the related fields of human resource management, career development, and quality improvement.
4. Encouraging and supporting the Human Resource Development research efforts of University of Minnesota faculty and students.
5. Encouraging and supporting the national and international community of scholars in Human Resource Development.

The Human Resource Development Research Center's program of work is accomplished through cooperative efforts with industry, business, and government in the forms of contracted research, internships, seminars, workshops, and consultations.

Expertise. The Human Resource Development Research Center is supported by a professional resource pool that has both breadth and depth. A mature 14 member Human Resource Development research faculty along with an energetic cadre of over 100 Human Resource Development graduate students serve the Human Resource Development Research Center and

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participate in the University's Human Resource Development academic program. Their areas of expertise are wide-ranging, including:

- Strategic planning
- Performance analysis
- Cost-benefit analysis
- Quality improvement
- Change process
- Team building
- Program evaluation
- Career development
- Computer applications
- Instructional technology
- Distance learning
- Workplace literacy
- International Human Resource Development

Dr. Richard A. Swanson serves as Director of the Center. He is also Professor of Human Resource Development at the University of Minnesota, 1954 Buford Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55101.

Research Contributions. The following is a selected list of outcomes resulting from Human Resource Development Research Center activities. A detailed list of Human Resource Development Research Center publications is available upon request.

- Sponsor of over 70 Human Resource Development research studies.
- Theory-to-Practice *Monograph Series* in partnership with ASTD.
- Editorial home of the *Human Resource Development Quarterly* in partnership with ASTD and Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Theory-to-Practice internship program in partnership with business, industry, and government.

Ecstasies and Agonies of the Human Resource Development Research Center

This section opens and closes with the same conclusion-- having the University of Minnesota Human Resource Development Research Center has been worth the effort.

Ecstasies. The ecstasies of having a research center are powerful. They including keeping research out in front, giving credibility, providing a flexible mechanism for innovation, and the best possible platform for "win, win, and win" efforts.

Keeps research out in front. It is as simple as viewing the university's "teaching-service-research" triage as an triangle lying flat on the surface or as an upright triangle with research at the peak and teaching and services flowing out of the inquiry.

Gives credibility. The only universal in higher education is the respect that is ultimately paid to the generation of new knowledge and publishing the inquiry. Having a research center is a statement about the importance of the field and the seriousness of those connected to it.

Provides a flexible mechanism for innovation. Research seems to have an infrastructure that is less cumbersome and less prescriptive than the teaching and service domains of university activity. Furthermore, universities have numerous ways of (1) recognizing and managing centers and (2) numerous ways to receive and dispense funds.

Best possible platform for "win, win, and win" efforts. The opportunities for partnerships are numerous. The typical partners-- faculty, industry, and graduate students-- come to the table with complimentary agendas-- not conflicting agendas. And, without competition and the threat of exploitation, projects can fly!

Agonies. The agonies are powerful distracters. They include the agonies of dealing with weak partners, money, multi-everything, and loneliness.

Weak Partners. It happens all the time. You may really like the human resource development manager of the company you are talking to, while if his/her organization is not going to allow it to happen. Get out quick without burning any bridges and come back at a better time.

Another example is student researchers who don't deliver in terms of timeliness, quantity, or quality. Centers need a performance management that differs from instruction.

Money. It is no replacement for intelligence and passion. And, just when is enough money enough? I have yet to see a relationship between the size of the research budget and the quality of the research results. I believe there is a very high relationship between budget freedom and results. Otherwise, I'll take $15,000 with no strings attached to it over $65,000 of obligations.

Multi-everything. Everybody has an agenda and they will try to alter yours. Before you know it your center will be a multidisciplinary center of people who have minimal interest in the core issues of Human Resource Development or you will have a multicultural center of people who have agendas that do not come near the performance requirements of organizations. Saying this, both of these perspectives can be legitimate Human Resource Development Research Center research projects.

Loneliness. I believe research is an inherently lonely process. The required skepticism and concern for excellence drives a scholar inside. One of the best things a university-based center can do is break this loneliness-- to create a research community within an academic community. And, to foster an atmosphere of trust and regular opportunities for joy and celebration.

Conclusion

The University of Minnesota's Human Resource Development Research Center is in the process of evaluating, redefining, and re-energizing itself. The expectation is that the Center will be stronger as a result of this process. Whatever the outcome of this assessment, for those of us who have been with it since it's inception, having the Center has been more than worth the effort.